



TOP 10 STORIES OF 2012

Hot and bothered

Record warming, rocky year for Store Norske, planet watching, fire top Svalbard's news in 2012

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

For the world's northernmost town, the year 2012 was about feeling the heat.

Much of it was searing as coal mining saw fiscal and human suffering, climate change arguably passed the "tipping point," and misdeeds had government officials scandals wilting under pressure.

But some were heartwarming, as years of local work on a rover finally made outer space a hot thing again globally and residents came together to put the tragic shootings of July 22, 2011, at Utøya as much in the past as possible.

Unlike that tragedy or the fatal attack by a polar bear on a youth camp the year before, there were no single incidents at the top of the 10 biggest stories in Svalbard for 2012. Instead, they reflected cumulative situations that have been brewing for years and finally reached the boiling point:

1. Store Norske's rocky year

The mining company representing the biggest portion of Longyearbyen's economy was trying to get past a costly and massive corruption scandal that dominated headlines for the past couple of years. Instead, they endured even more widespread suffering with a "terrible" record financial loss and "unacceptable" safety conditions that cost one worker his arm.

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COURTESY OF LESLEY BUTLER AND ROB BELL



NASA



STORE NORSKE

Climate activists Lesley Butler and Rob Bell, top, sunbathe on the snow in Longyearbyen in a picture some news organizations chose as one of the top depictions of climate change in 2012. At bottom left, the Mars rover Curiosity, tested extensively in Svalbard, transmits a self-portrait from the Red Planet near the end of the year. At bottom right, Kim-Allan Thoresen, an equipment operator for Store Norske, peers optimistically from a coal-processing machine early in the year. But the mood of many employees turned to frustration due to numerous injuries and malfunctions that halted production.

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Designated driver and liar

Column: More than the locals get taken for a ride by a taxi driver as the New Year rings in

By **BRENNAN PURTZER**
Copy Editor

In many ways, New Year's Eve on Svalbard is like any other wild weekend night on Svalbard, at least for a cabbie. Lots of drunk people, lots of mayhem, people falling into your lap on every right turn – but in some ways it was special.

See **CABBIE**, page 3



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

A taxi takes off with passengers from Kroa shortly after midnight New Year's Day.

Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

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When we screw up you'll know about it – on the front page. One of the big complaints about newspapers is they tend to bury corrections and clarifications deep inside where few people who read the original article see them. If we need to fix something, an alert box on the front page will state what story is in error and where the full correction is printed.

Submitting material

Letters, columns, photos and other material are welcome, but we can't offer pay for published items since nobody here is getting paid at the moment. Submissions in electronic form (text, Word documents, JPEGs, etc.) are highly preferred, although typing and/or scanning of items will be considered on a per-case basis. We reserve the right to edit submissions for length, clarity, accuracy, libel and other reasons, but we will also make every reasonable effort to contact the author about any changes prior to publication.

The weather outside is frightful, but...



Families dance and sing during the annual Christmas tree party, above, Friday at Svalbard Church. At left, Priest Leif Magne Helgesen delivers the first of two Christmas Eve Masses at the church. Residents had to dig out of paralyzing blizzards during the week to reach holiday events. Photos by Mark Sabbatini / Icepeople.

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

The world didn't end in 2012 – or the after-life is so much like another day of toil we didn't notice – but since we're musing in this issue about how it caught a nasty fever we'll keep the theme simmering here. Bringing the heat early this year are some truly sick minds (we mean that in a good way) as **the black metal band Claymords will be releasing their new album "Scum of the Earth" during a Feb. 16 gig at Svalbar.** We're in no way qualified to offer an opinion about the band's artistic merits, so those wanting to determine if they're in for pain or pleasure can audition tunes at www.facebook.com/claymords ... Those needing a chill can check out the heat being felt by **Scottish wildlife cameraman**



COURTESY OF CLAYMORDS

Overheated expectations: Do this at a release party and the album's going to seem pretty dull.

Gordon Buchanan, who got his cage literally rattled by a polar bear while filming a documentary scheduled to air next week on BBC Two. He spent three seasons in Svalbard following a polar bear family as part of a series. Google his name for preview clips now online at news sites, along with dozens of amusing reader comments about his bravery/stupidity ... Finally, while doomsday isn't here, Bob Ramsay of *The Star* in Toronto helpfully reminds us it's creeping up on everyone (suggesting we visit www.deathclock.com to see how much time we have left) and **recommends Svalbard as one of those trips one ought to take with those few remaining years.**



BBC TWO

Sweating it out: This is one way to stay warm in the Arctic without a fire. Just not the best way.



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Residents young and old, above, watch fireworks near the center of Longyearbyen just after midnight on New Year's Day. At left, Kent Solberg and Sofie Marlen Solberg, 9, purchase fireworks at Svalbardbutikken on New Year's Eve. A storm with wind gusts exceeding 70 km/h during the day prompted a warning from the governor's office to exercise extreme caution and keep fireworks far away from buildings. But winds diminished considerably by midnight, as did snow that caused near-whiteout conditions only hours earlier. Officials said there were no significant incidents.

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM
SVALBARDPOSTEN
VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Worker loses arm in accident at Svea; cause still unknown

A worker injured by equipment at Svea's coal-processing plant just before Christmas had to have his arm amputated, according to officials who said the cause of the accident remains under investigation. The incident occurred Dec. 20 as the worker was removing debris from a roller on a machine that separates rock and coal. He was brought to Longyearbyen Hospital by a rescue helicopter from the Svalbard governor's office, but poor weather delayed by one day an air ambulance flight to Tromsø so his arm could be operated on. Store Norske officials said the man has since transferred to a hospital in his hometown for additional treatment. It is the second major accident at the processing plant since it began operating in June of 2011. Operations were halted until inspections were conducted by the governor's office and national Labour Inspectorate, but are scheduled to resume this week as no regulatory violations were found. Formal reports on the cause of the accident are still pending.

2012 is second-warmest year

The average temperature at Svalbard Airport in 2012 was minus two degrees Celsius, more than four degrees above normal and the second-warmest year since measurements began there in 1975. "Especially now, in the 2000s, there have been a number of extremely warm years in Longyearbyen," said Bernt Lie, a national weather service statistician. "Not since 1988 has there been a single year that has been colder than normal." Last year got off to a mild start, with a one-day record of seven degrees set in February. The year's highest temperature was 13 degrees on July 15.

Study: Birds ingesting more PCBs in Russian settlements

Snow buntings are ingesting more pollutants in Barentsburg and Pyramiden than Longyearbyen and Ny-Ålesund, according to a study by the Norwegian Polar Institute. "This makes the snow bunting a good indicator of the state of the environment in Svalbard," said Geir Wing Gabrielsen, an NPI researcher who noted overall PCB levels have declined since 2005 due to cleanups.

Telling tall tales from a taxi

CABBIE, from page 1

I was blessed to eat *middag* with my adopted Norwegian family, and what a delicious turkey it was. The best company, too.

When the driving started around midnight, I wasn't sure what to expect. The fireworks were better than I imagined. People were milling around and even walking to their bars in the sub-zero temperature. Truly, it wasn't so cold.

But that didn't keep my partner from getting our shuttle bus stuck in a ditch. We were able to pull him out, though it kept some people waiting late into the night outside Huset. But they all made it home eventually.

There was no singing in the cab tonight, my friends. I had several of those moments when a man puts his arm around me as his girl steps from the car, points at her and brags, "You see her, I'm going to bed with her tonight." Usually

those guys tip the poor sucker who has to drive them home pretty well.

But my favorite moment came when someone from mainland Norway decided to call our taxi service just to check the weather in our frozen wasteland.

What temperature was it, they asked me *pa Norsk*. At first I told them it was only about two degrees below freezing. But they didn't believe me, after all, this was the NORTH POLE.

"Hva?" they asked. "Nei!" So I apologized and said I misunderstood. Then I told them it was 40 below and there was a blizzard. That's what they wanted to hear! They laughed and felt so much better. So I carried it further, and mimicked the sounds of being mauled to death by an *ishjorn*. They loved that part.

Happy New Year everybody!

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Light snow. E winds to 35 km/h. High 1C (-4C wind chill), low 0C (-5C wind chill).	Snow. E winds to 32 km/h. High 0C (-5C wind chill), low -1C (-6C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. E winds to 39 km/h. High -1C (-7C wind chill), low -8C (-13C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. Variable winds to 32 km/h. High -4C (-10C wind chill), low -8C (-13C wind chill).
24-hour darkness	24-hour darkness	24-hour darkness	24-hour darkness
Extended forecast: Sunday, snow, -1C (-7C), -4C (-11C), light 0:00h; Monday, snow, -2C (-6C), -3C (-7C), light 0:00h; Tuesday, p. cloudy, -2C (-7C), -4C (-8C), light 0:00h; Wednesday, cloudy, -2C (-7C), -7C (-14C), light 0:00h			
Data provided by storm.no			



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Firefighters work to extinguish a fire in the roof of Longyearbyen's power plant Dec. 7 that forced a three-day shutdown of the generators, but the city's backup facility kept the lights from flickering.

2012: A year for feeling the heat

HEADLINES, from page 1

The year began optimistically, with Store Norske muscling government agencies for permission to begin developing a coal mine at Lunckefjell, expected to extend local production for four years as other mines diminish.

But equipment malfunctions halted production at Svea from April to September, which combined with low coal prices in Europe is expected to result in a loss of 260 million kroner this year, a record since production began at Svea 12 years ago. The outlook remains bleak and officials said even Lunckefjell is unlikely to provide a significant boost if it begins operating as scheduled this year.

Mining was also briefly halted due to numerous worker injuries, with the company hoping safety training would alleviate employee and government concerns. But the most serious accident occurred just before Christmas when a man injured his arm in a processing machine, forcing doctors in Tromsø to amputate it.

2. Climate change chaos

The constant dire warnings and signs we've heard for decades were still there: record sea ice melt, first sighting of warmer-weather species as native life is devastated, etc. But 2012 saw harsh real-world impacts, beginning with record-high winter temperatures triggering avalanches and landslides that demolished local roads and

bridges. Geologists revealed numerous buildings near mountains are threatened by landslides, the North Pole expedition season was the shortest ever (due also to bungling new management that caused hot tempers) and the turbulent local weather was blamed for winter storms that caused hundreds of deaths in Europe.

3. Mars rocks, Venus shines

While scientists and tourists often say Svalbard is like visiting another planet, actually looking to other worlds became a burning desire for many in 2012. The Mars rover Curiosity, tested extensively here due to geological similarities to the Red Planet, has been constantly fascinating academics and plebs alike with its high-resolution images since landing there. And hundreds of pro and amateur skywatchers flocked to Longyearbyen in June to watch the last Transit of Venus across the sun until 2117.

4. Fire halts power plant

A potentially dire crisis was largely avoided when a fire ignited in the roof of Longyearbyen's power plant Dec. 7, damaging equipment and forcing the shutdown of the main generators for three days. But a backup plant kept the lights from even flickering most places.

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.



LONGYEARBYEN LOKALSTYRE

Christin Kristoffersen, left, is getting serious consideration as Svalbard's first member of Parliament due to a sex scandal that unseated the top Labor Party candidate in the Troms region. At right, a memorial for Johannes Buø, 14, killed during the July 22, 2011, tragedy at Utøya, is unveiled at Svalbard Church.



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

What's up

Jan. 6

11 a.m.: Mass. Svalbard Church.

6 p.m.: Movie: "Finding Nemo" (3d), U.S. animated/children's film, ages 7 and up. Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "The Angels' Share," British drama/comedy, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

Jan. 7

7 p.m.: Trivia quiz. Kulturhuset cafe.

Jan. 8

7 p.m.: Fireplace gathering. Svalbard Church.

Jan. 10-13

Training weekend for Polarpuls, taught by visiting instructors. Svalbardhallen. Registration and details available at polarpuls@gmail.com.

Jan. 10

7:30 p.m.: Theater performance: "Helt bort Fra Tiden" ("Completely Away From Time"), featuring two stories of tragedies in Svalbard. A discussion about the performances by drama professor Tor Helge Allern of Høgskolen in Nesna is scheduled at 6:30 p.m. Kulturhuset.

Jan. 13

11 a.m.: Mass. Svalbard Church.

6 p.m.: Movie: "Lotte og Månesteinens Hemmelighet," Estonian animated/children's film dubbed in Norwegian, no age limit specified. Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Jack Reacher," U.S. drama/crime, no age limit specified. Kulturhuset.

Jan. 14

7 p.m.: Trivia quiz. Kulturhuset cafe.

Jan. 15

8 p.m.: Svalbard seminar 2013. First of a series on Tuesday and Thursday nights. UNIS.

Jan. 16

6 p.m.: Movie: "The Good Teacher," French drama, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

What's online

Icepeople.net provides daily updates of news about Svalbard and the world's polar regions, plus extras for articles from the print edition. Among the latest news:

- *Alaska drilling rig accident ignites debate*
- *Brits bail on major Antarctic lake project*
- *Study: Warming helps Arctic species*
- *Climate change to make Mars habitable?*